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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3475
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 2085
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2317
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1714
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2069
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2490
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4922
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

AF/S FOR G. GARLAND
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B.PITTMAN
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR L.DOBBS AND E.LOKEN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ECPS](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: AGREEMENT'S MEDIA PROVISIONS LACKING

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Local Zimbabwe media groups have cautiously welcomed the signing of the power-sharing agreement between the Zimbabwe National African Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), noting that it offers some hope for media reform. The groups say the agreement acknowledges the need for media reform especially in relation to the entry of new players and reconstituting key media regulatory structures in the country. We are more skeptical, because the agreement denounces foreign broadcasters like Voice of America (VOA), and doesn't go as far as necessary in guaranteeing a free press. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The September 15 power-sharing agreement between ZANU-PF and the two MDC factions includes several provision related to media. Article 19 of the agreement covers Freedom of Expression and Communication and recognizes the "right to freedom of expression and the role of the media in a multi-party democracy." However, it does not include an explicit commitment to repeal the repressive Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Public Order and Security Act (POSA). The parties merely agree that the "government shall ensure immediate processing of all applications for re-registration and registration" under AIPPA; instead of calling for the lifting of repressive media laws, the agreement states that all Zimbabwean journalists be allowed to register under those laws. The agreement does call for balanced coverage in the media and states that "public and private media shall refrain from using abusive language that may incite hostility, political intolerance and ethnic hatred."

¶3. (SBU) Article 19 states that "foreign government funded external radio stations broadcasting into Zimbabwe are not in Zimbabwe's national interest," calls on governments to cease funding and hosting such stations and encourages Zimbabweans working for them to come home. This is clearly targeted at VOA and SW Radio.

¶4. (U) Media watchdog groups in Zimbabwe have cautiously welcomed the agreement. The Zimbabwe chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) said the agreement "should usher in a new era of tolerance and diversity of views." MISA further urged the incoming government to transform state-run radio and TV into a

"truly independent public broadcaster," and called for the repeal of all repressive legislation that targets the media. In a statement, the Media Monitoring Project (MMPZ) also welcomed the agreement but raised concern that Article 19 of the agreement "substantially fails to meet internationally recognized standards regarding media freedom," which MMPZ says "can only be achieved by the complete reform of all repressive media legislation."

15. (SBU) Exiled Zimbabwean journalist Basildon Peta, writing in the South African based newspaper the "Mercury" (September 18), says that the agreement has not brought any relief so that he "can re-enter a new democratic country in which the rights of citizens are respected." "I just don't see how it (the deal) will work," said Peta. Similar sentiments have been echoed by Wilf Mbanga, editor of the independent newspaper the "Zimbabwean." Mbanga, some of whose employees were tortured by state agents, says that there are no guarantees that his reporters will be allowed to work freely. Several foreign journalists entered Zimbabwe clandestinely to cover the signing of the agreement after the Ministry of Information refused to authorize their visits. No arrests have been reported but journalists that we have talked to are not working openly, fearing arrest.

16. (SBU) COMMENT. The power-sharing agreement between the major political parties in Zimbabwe acknowledges the need for a free media environment, but fails to call for the necessary reforms. Its call for the closure of VOA and similar broadcasters clearly advances the ZANU-PF agenda. Unless the MDC gains control of the Ministry of Information we are skeptical about the prospects for real reform in the short term. In any case, we will closely monitor developments

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with respect to press freedom as the agreement is implemented. END
COMMENT.

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